

INTERVIEWER:
KHURRAM
SHAHZAD

LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM FRANK ISLAM

The American Dream, while it is a quintessentially American aspiration, each of us has a unique vision of just what it is. For some, the dream is a chance to build a successful business and for others, it's a home of their own. It is a personal commitment, a determination to devote our life and exercise our Liberty to discover our natural talent or what we love to do and do best. We have many examples of it in America and I met one of them, Frank Islam, who came in America with similar dreams and then accomplished and maintained it using his best



natural talent.

1. Tell us something about you, a short introduction

I came to the United States from India at the age of 15. I got my masters and bachelors in computer science at the University of Colorado. That gave me the knowledge I needed to go into business. I always wanted to start my own business but I knew that I needed experience first. So, I worked with two major information technology firms in the Washington DC area for more than a decade. That gave me the skills and real world grounding that I needed to be a business owner.

Then, in 1994, I purchased the QSS Group for \$45,000. Within 13 years, along with my management team, we took that firm from a workforce of 1 employee to more than 2,000 employees and approximately \$300 million in revenue.

The team of talented managers was central to everything. Success in business is a team sport. So, when people ask me how I became successful, it was not me but who made it happen.

Finally, I sold my company to Perot Sys-

tems in 2007. That sale allowed me to establish a private foundation that supports educational, cultural and artistic causes in the United States and around the world and to write on topics that is important to the future of this country and the world.

2. When have you been most satisfied in your life?

That's easy – it's right now. That's because since I sold my business for quite a bit of money, I have been able to dedicate myself to advancing important causes and helping others by providing ladders of opportunity to succeed.

I firmly believe that to whom much is given, much is expected. That is why I am focusing today on sharing and giving back. In many ways that process of sharing and giving back is more rewarding than any of the money that I have earned throughout my business career

3. Who is your role model and why?

John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Not because he was a politician but because he was a man of peace who called upon us all to get involved and to make a positive difference in our country and the world. In his inaugural address, President Kennedy famously said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." That appeal resonated with me when I was a youth and even more so now.

I am continuously looking for ways to make contributions to my birth country of India and my adopted homeland of the United States. I support charities and educational institutions in both places. I have written two books in the past three years directed at making the United States a better place and the American dream achievable for all Americans.

Another quote from JFK that is not as well known also motivates me. Kennedy said, "World peace, like community peace, does not require that each man love his neighbor -- it requires only that they live together with mutual tolerance, submitting their disputes to a just and peaceful settlement."

I agree with President Kennedy's perspective and that is why I serve on the advisory council and have given generously to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) – an organization devoted to the nonviolent prevention and mitigation of deadly conflict around the globe.

4. What things do you not like to do?

I am a perfectionist and as a result I believe that anything worth doing is worth doing well.

Having said that, I must confess that I did not participate in many sports as a youth and – unlike many of my American and Indian friends – do not watch



many sporting events these days. I appreciate the talent on display on the sporting fields but find that I am much more interested in reading or watching quality TV programming like Downton Abbey.

5. Tell me about an accomplishment that you consider to be most significant?

As I mentioned earlier, growing my business was an accomplishment, but as with most accomplishments, it was not mine alone. It was a team effort. I believe that many people as they become more successful forget that.

I also believe that life is a journey and not a destination and that each of us de-



fines ourselves by what we do throughout that journey. There are accomplishments and setbacks along the way and they are part of the process of "being and becoming". As such, they all matter at that point in time.

My most significant accomplishment then will be the next one to come on the journey...and the one after that, and the one after that....

6. What honors/awards have you received?

I have been privileged and blessed to receive many honors and awards. I truly

appreciate all of them.

Two that have special meaning for me because of my interests and heritage are: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Legacy Award for International Service that I will receive on January 18 of this year and the Community Achievement Award from the American Federation of Muslims of Indian origin that I received last year.

7. Are you involved in any community organizations (charities, mosques, etc.)

I support numerous charities and am involved with many organizations both here in the United States and India.

I serve on the Kennedy Center Board of Trustees and am on advisory councils and boards for distinguished organizations such as the Brookings Institution, Woodrow Wilson Center, Johns Hopkins University and American University.

My primary connection to India at present is with my alma mater, Aligarh University. I have assisted in fundraising with Aligarh alums here in the states, given speeches to faculty and students in India, and will be supporting development of a new business school there.

8. Tell me something about yourself that people might not readily know.

I'm a fairly transparent and straightforward guy. I try to be honest and direct in my relationships and expect the same in return.

Given this, two things that bother me are people with hidden agendas and those who don't deliver on commitments either substantively or in a timely manner.